

AFFIRMATION

---- April 1979 ----
United Methodists for
Lesbian and Gay Concerns

STAFF FOR AFFIRMATION

The spring meeting of AFFIRMATION confirmed and implemented preliminary plans made last fall to employ staff to facilitate the work of the caucus between now and the upcoming General Conference. Responding to the need to maintain gender parity in its leadership and to the overwhelming amount of work to be done over the next fifteen months, members present in Dayton agreed to employ Michael Collins of New York City and Peggy Harmon of Dallas as Co-Coordiators for a twelve month period beginning June 1, 1979. Each of the two staff persons will receive a subsistence level stipend in addition to allowances for travel and other expenses.

It was agreed that the decision would have to be evaluated in the light of financial realities at the fall meeting. A report on pledge income showed that about half the cash needed to operate the planned program between April and October of this year is now on hand.

Responsibilities of the co-coordinators include representing AFFIRMATION to the church, being available to participate in workshops on human sexuality and in other educational arenas, providing support on behalf of the caucus to persons whose situations result in a special need for a loving-caring response, and coordinating the many activities in which AFFIRMATION is involved. Reports of their work as co-convenors which Peggy and Michael made at the Dayton meeting indicate that there are many strategic opportunities for them to represent Gay and Lesbian concerns. The stipends they receive, along with support from the significant others in their lives, will permit them to be free of full-time job responsibilities to coordinate AFFIRMATION's ministries.

The move to paid staff leadership caused a need to re-think how the group would function in meetings. The Dayton meeting accepted a task-force recommendation which provides for the publication of proposed agenda in advance of a meeting and rotating the tasks of chairing meeting sessions and recording actions. Another procedural decision was that AFFIRMATION would adopt an intentionally consensual decision-making style, rather than employing voting and parliamentary procedures. Though the decision did not represent a major change from previous practice, it does reflect a decision about how the group would function rather than an assumption. A brief training session on effective consensus building will be part of future meetings.

Creation of a Staff Liaison Committee was another result of the commitment to employ paid staff and will serve as a vehicle to preserve mutual accountability between the caucus and the co-coordinators. The ten-member committee, which includes equal numbers of women and men, held an initial meeting in Dayton and reported both an outline job description for the co-coordinators and a statement of the committee's own responsibilities. It was emphasized that the Staff Liaison Committee will not serve as a body to make policy on behalf of AFFIRMATION; rather, it will assist in interpreting policy and priority decisions of the group to the Co-coordinators. In addition to the accountability function already mentioned, the committee will also serve as a resource to the staff for both information and support.

AFFIRMATION TO GO TO INDIANAPOLIS

The 1979 fall meeting of AFFIRMATION will be held in Indianapolis, IN., Oct. 5 to Oct. 7, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Friday at All Saints Episcopal Church at 16th and central streets. The weekend agenda will include items relating to the UMC General Conference there April 15-25, 1980, educational and community building programs, and financial reports. There will also be a reception and social hour for AFFIRMATION members hosted by the several Gay/Lesbian groups of Indianapolis. Private housing and hotel accommodations can be made through prior registration which will be announced in the summer edition of the Newsletter.

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Women's Caucus

AFFIRMATION's newly formed Women's Caucus met Saturday night at Dayton for celebration and discussion. The caucus reached consensus in three areas: strategies for General Conference, issues within AFFIRMATION, and suggestions for AFFIRMATION's agenda beyond General Conference.

General Conference strategy included the need for Lesbian visibility with the specific request that a Lesbian be in charge of media coverage.

The issues concerning AFFIRMATION internally emphasized; the need for a separate time for women to meet when we will not be excluded from decision making sessions, the importance of developing a network for Lesbians and supportive straight women, and the need for absolute confidentiality about attendance at meetings on the part of the membership and the press. It was specifically suggested that the press only be invited to a specific meeting; otherwise a press release would be issued or a press conference held. In order that AFFIRMATION reflect the diversity of United Methodism, support and awareness must be developed toward the concerns of Lesbian mothers and racial minorities. In addition, what women's issues need to be included if the next AFFIRMATION meeting is an educational event.

In order to insure that diversity within AFFIRMATION is developed and to strengthen our commitment to the elimination of racism, classism, and ageism, the caucus recommended that AFFIRMATION's agenda beyond General Conference include awareness training, and support of other groups in their struggles for human rights. Various agencies such as the Commission on Religion and Race and ethnic caucuses could be used as resources.

On the celebrative side, pizza, music and dancing were enjoyed by all. We look forward to increased numbers and more sharing in Indianapolis.

AFFIRMATION's Newsletter, published four times a year, is included in \$10.00 membership mailable to a co-coordinator. Changes of address to Newsletter Editor, Ed Egan, [REDACTED] Haverstraw, New York [REDACTED]

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY CONFERENCE

The Gay Caucus of Union Theological Seminary in New York City hosted a Conference for Gay Seminarians the last weekend of April. Drawing primarily seminarians from the Northeast, the conference offered a time for Lesbians and Gay men to reflect on our impact on seminaries and the various ministries of the church, as well as to formulate strategy for changing school and denominational policies.

A keynote address on "Parabolic Theology: our Ethic", was given by Ms. Sandy Brawders, an M.Div. senior at Princeton Theological Seminary who spoke in favor of the ordination of gays at the United Presbyterian (USA) General Assembly in San Diego last year. The Rev. Dr. Bill Johnson, the first openly gay man to be ordained in the United Church of Christ, spoke on "Our Next Move"

From this conference it is the hope of Union's Gay Caucus to launch a national convocation for Lesbian and Gay seminarians to be held in 1979-1980.

A NEW BROCHURE in A new brochure describing AFFIRMATION
Three Languages and inviting people to get involved will soon be available as a decision made at Dayton is implemented. Proposed by the Communication Task Force, the one-sheet three-fold is designed to tell about AFFIRMATION's purposes, history, leadership and operating style. Aimed primarily at Gay and Lesbian United Methodists not yet a part of AFFIRMATION, it is expected also to be a part of the process of educating the church as a whole.

Especially exciting is the fact that the brochure will appear in English, Spanish and Korean and perhaps other languages as a part of AFFIRMATION's newly expressed intention to reflect a wide ethnic and cultural diversity. Suggestions for additional translations will be particularly welcome when they include a source for translation and/or printing.

Literature tables in churches and at conferences plus college and seminary bulletin boards are only a few of the places where the new brochure can be used to let people know who we are and what we're about. The Co-coordinators, Peggy or Michael, may be contacted for a supply of brochures. (see page 5.)

ACROSS THE CHURCH

A Review ---- by Dick Cash

Since the October, 1979, meeting of AFFIRMATION in Denver, the United Methodist Church has been alive with discussion at all levels on issues related to Lesbians and Gay Men. Most of the discussions are continuation of what we have been following for the past several years with the addition of at least two new groups to whose agenda gay-related issues have been added. Some of the events since last October are:

GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY, at its fall meeting in October, passed a resolution: a) calling for the church to build effective communication channels between and among members and homosexuals; b) urged the church to be sensitive to the needs of homosexuals and their families, and c) reaffirmed the Board's position on full human rights for all.

Over 25 members of the Board signed letters to Garrett Evangelical Seminary and to Illiff Seminary protesting actions by those two institutions denying advancement/admission to openly gay people.

GENERAL BOARD OF DISCIPLESHIP, at its March, 1979, meeting reaffirmed its support for the packet "Homosexuality and Families" which had been attacked from various quarters, primarily the United Methodist Reporter. Dr. Leon Smith, BOD staff member, had been the target of the attacks.

GENERAL BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES: At the October meeting of the Women's Division it was recommended with few dissenting votes: 1) to study and discuss the need for civil rights legislation for homosexuals; 2) to develop criteria for evaluating and recommending legislation to protect the civil rights of homosexuals; 3) to oppose California's Proposition 6, the Briggs Initiative; and 4) to commend Bishop Marvin Stuart and the leadership of the California-Nevada Conference as well as the Division of Church and Society and the Conference executive committee of the UMW for their opposition to Proposition 6. A preface gave the background and context from which the Division worked and its history on the issue in the 1976 Policy Statement on Human Sexuality.

GENERAL BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND MINISTRY, at its meeting in March the Division of Ordained Ministry (DOM) of the BHEM noted that a footnote to paragraph 404 of the Discipline had been

omitted. The footnote includes a review of questions asked of ministerial candidates, steps into ministry and the derogatory part of the Social Principles statement relative to homosexuality. The DOM asked that an erratum be issued. The Division also adopted the footnote as its position concerning the ordination of homosexuals.

THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS, in a closed session at its November meeting, declined to request a ruling on appointability of "homosexual" ministers from the Judicial Council. The COB deemed it was not its prerogative to be the conduit for petitions to the Judicial Council from annual conferences or groups within an annual conference, according to Bishop Ralph T. Alton of Indianapolis. Bishop Alton recalled that the council in April of 1975 did take a stand on the issue of the ordination of homosexuals, stating they believed such persons are not ordainable in the United Methodist Church. The issue before the bishops last November dealt with the appointability of someone already ordained. According to Alton, "Bishops are bound by the Discipline to appoint anyone who is a full member of an annual conference...the role of the bishop and the cabinet is administrative and pastoral rather than judicial." (UMC Press release, Nov. 17, 1978)

SEMINARIAN CAUCUS: Student representatives from all 13 United Methodist seminaries, meeting February 15-17, 1979, asked the Division of Ordained Ministry of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry to take the following question to the Judicial Council: "Does paragraph 906.13 of the Discipline mean that United Methodist seminaries cannot accept gay students?" (Newscope, March 2, 1979) No report as yet on action by the Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

(over)

METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL ACTION executive committee in February voted to petition the General Conference to: remove the "perjorative" language in relation to homosexuals from the social principles; and delete any prohibitions on funding homosexual groups or caucuses. (Newscope, Feb. 23, 1979)

COALITION FOR THE WHOLE GOSPEL was formed in late February at a meeting of about 50 people in Madison, Wis. This coalition of individuals (and eventually groups, perps) call themselves liberal/progressive people. At the February meeting the Coalition agreed to work for the following lesbian/gay related issues: 1) deletion of Discipline paragraph 906.13; 2) deletion of derogatory language in the Social Principles, and 3) the protection of "the rights of homosexual persons in ordination."

AD HOC STUDY GROUP ON GENERAL CONFERENCE, consisting mainly of clergy and lay people from large sized churches, has met a couple of times. They claim not to be related to Good News, but there is a great deal of overlap in membership and have a very similar agenda to that of Good News. At their Jan. 31-Feb. 1 meeting of about 100 minister and laypersons from 14 states, the group "urged the UMC to 'shut the barn door' on homosexual ministers" and called for the right of local churches to designate their financial gifts to the general church. Under the leadership of Leighton K. Farrell, minister of Highland Park UMC in Dallas, Texas, the group unanimously approved a petition to the 1980 General Conference which would make "any person practicing a homosexual lifestyle...ineligible for ordination and/or appointment by a bishop in the United Methodist Church."

GOOD NEWS magazine continues to give significant space to coverage of gay news and issues. In the Sept.-Oct. issue was a five page "Update on the Homosexual Issues", also called "the homosexual crisis." Another in a series of anti-gay editorials appeared entitled, "Here We Go Again #3", concentrating its wrath on the New York Conference for upholding the Abels' appointment and on Bishop Ward's lack of courage. To prevent the recurrence of such "an atrocity", the editorial calls the General Conference to declare that no "non-repentant homosexual shall be ordained or continue there-in in the ministry of the United Methodist Church."

In a December special Good News mailing, AFFIRMATION was the target of a variety of rhetoric and charges including: "Evidently the homosexual activists mean business!! They are going to keep on pushing until our United Methodist Church approves homosexual practice... Obviously, the homosexual caucus is building a war chest. Obviously they are stepping up their all-out effort to bend United Methodism in a pro-homosexual direction." From the above it seems clear that Good News intends to make homosexuality a priority issue for the upcoming annual and General conferences. It is equally clear that they are using homophobia for fundraising.

IN SUMMARY:

These are reports of at least some of what is happening at the national level of our church. We know that much more discussion and action has occurred in local church and conferences and at other levels of the church and that this discussion is escalating. During the next year our visibility and our ability to articulate clearly who we are as individuals and as a group will be crucial. We must continue to take an aggressive position at all levels of the church, helping people to know us as Christian persons, as parts of families, parents, children, parts of work/school/play institutions--indeed in all aspects of our lives. This kind of one to one contact, particularly with those who influence the direction of our church, can move us great strides in overcoming homophobia in the United Methodist Church.

We should expect increased attacks on AFFIRMATION and on the individuals who are openly gay/lesbian within it. We also should expect our non-gay supporters to be under attack. We need to find ways of supporting and sustaining each other during what I think will be an extremely negative and hostile time.

We must also remember that our commitment to the United Methodist Church is just a part of our commitment to Christ and to all of God's creation. General Conference 1980 will come and go; perhaps even the UMC will come and go; but we must have a vision that enables us to live/move on as we struggle for justice and liberation, throughout the world and for all people.

Our struggle, linked to the struggle of oppressed people throughout the world, is a long one. From God and each other will come the strength to continue.

Co-Coordiators Report

Continuing to build upon our objective of creating a supportive community/network, AFFIRMATION's co-coordinators are involved in a number of workshops this spring. Peggy Harmon and Michael Collins are directly involved in the following experiences and have been working with persons who are doing a number of educational events in their local churches, districts, and annual conferences as well. They report:

---Michael---

Saturday April 28: I helped lead a workshop with United Methodist Seminarians from the Northeast at Union Theological Seminary. We focussed on what is happening in the United Methodist Church. The workshop was a part of a larger Northeastern Seminarian Conference on Homosexuality and the Church which is being planned by the Gay Caucus at Union.

Saturday May 5: I have been invited to participate in a seminar on Homosexuality of the Board of Church and Society of the Western New York Conference. I will speak as a part of a panel on Saturday morning along with Letha Scanzoni (co-author of Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?). Virginia Davidson (Chairperson of the Presbyterian Task Force on Homosexuality), Leon Smith (Staff person from the Board of Discipleship), and David Seamonds (A leader of the Good News movement). In the afternoon I will lead a workshop on ordination and a second workshop on Ministries with Gay and Lesbian persons in the society.

Friday May 11-Sunday May 13: I will be one of the resource persons for a conference on Homosexuality in the United Methodist Church at Calvary UMC in Philadelphia. The conference is being planned by Calvary's Administrative Board with invitations to participate extended to members of the Annual Conference.

Beginning Sunday May 20: I will begin a seven week trip involving work/contacts in several annual conferences in the South Central and Western Jurisdictions, as well as meetings with folks in several cities. (If you are interested in setting up meetings for this trip, contact me at the address below.)

Michael Collins

New York, New York

---Peggy---

Spring is officially here and with it have come several opportunities. The first on my calendar was a Seminar on Human Rights presented by the United Methodist Women of the Hispanic Rio Grande Conference April 27-29, 1979, at the Mexican-American Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas. "The purpose of this Seminar is to focus on current social issues that are of concern to Mexican-American women in Texas, and to discover ways for the organization of United Methodist Women to develop effective strategies to involve our women, our church, and our society, in the struggle for human rights." I will present a workshop on "Homosexualidad" in Spanish.

Following this Seminar, I will go to New York and meet with several AFFIRMATION folks there.

Leaving New York, I will then travel to Washington, D.C. for a Strategy Conference on Homophobia in the Church. This conference "will address the current participation of gay people within individual denominations (the ministry and solidarity they are able to give and receive); the fears and tactics which limit their participation; and the relation of these fears and tactics to interdenominational and secular right wing politics. It will be a small, ecumenical, working group that will study these issues and strategize for change within the context of gospel values." (Taken from the Proposal for the "Strategy Conference on Homophobia".)

It is my hope that these opportunities will move us forward in our ongoing concerns of network building and the ministry to/with/for church and society.

Peggy Harmon

Dallas, Texas

INCORPORATION STATUS REPORT

AFFIRMATION adopted the "Articles of Incorporation" during our Dayton meeting and agreed upon a process for adoption of the by-laws which are presently being written. These actions make it possible for AFFIRMATION to move on in the process of incorporating. If all goes according to schedule, we will be incorporated in Texas as a non-profit organization around the first of June. We will then apply for our tax exempt status.

UMC CLERGY OF AFFIRMATION TO MEET Oct. 4

Clergy of the UMC concerned with Gay/Lesbian issues will meet at 6:30 p.m. on Oct. 4 in Indianapolis to get acquainted and to explore the possibility of a communication/friendship network. Housing accommodations can be arranged by writing AFFIRMATION/FELLOWSHIP, [REDACTED], Indianapolis, IN [REDACTED].

FUND-RAISING FOR AFFIRMATION

Since last October the members and friends of AFFIRMATION have pledged \$13,500 towards the \$22,600 budget we have adopted for the work of AFFIRMATION. Of the money pledged, \$3,500 has been contributed with an additional \$4,000 needed collection in the next six weeks in order to insure the cash flow needs of AFFIRMATION between now and October. The \$7,500 is needed to cover expenses of incorporating, paying the salaries and traveling expenses for Michael and Peggy, publication of three newsletters, basic operating expenses, and publication of an information brochure about the work of AFFIRMATION in Spanish, Korean, and English.

We still need to raise \$9,100 in pledges and contributions. Copies of fund raising letters which are appropriate for mailing to persons you know who would like to support our work are available from Michael or Peggy. If you would like to make a pledge or contribution, please fill out the form below and mail it to one of the co-coordinators.

-----A TEAR-OFF, not a RIP-OFF, for giving to AFFIRMATION-----

Please accept my contribution to AFFIRMATION of \$ _____ to support our work between now and June of 1980. I plan to pay \$ _____ per _____. My check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

Name: _____
Address: _____

FOOLS FOR CHRIST

I just wanted to share a random thought that struck me as we had our closing worship at the Dayton AFFIRMATION meeting. It suddenly hit me that it was April 1, April Fools' Day. And, while I've never been a part of a group that I experienced as more loving and concerned and serious of purpose, I've no doubt that to much of society we are the fools. To many people, Lesbians and Gay men are ludicrous -- to be laughed at. Perhaps that is just as well---because whey they begin to take us seriously, they persecute us.

But I'm not so sure I mind being the fool. After all, what has been the traditional role of the fool? To puncture society's pretenses, to relieve tension, to help others to accept their own quirks and foibles by magnifying them. Isn't this what we do? We cut through the pretenses of sexual role-playing, we are free of the pressures of conformity, we liberate men and women to accept their own "differentness". (You understand, I speak in the ideal abstract--in fact many of us are still trapped in our closets and unable to play this fool's role fully.)

In every generation some group must take this fools' role, it is what keeps society changing rather than stagnating and becoming self-satisfied. In the first century it was the Christian disciples who took this role. Paul said, "We are fools for Christ's sake".(I Cor.4:10a) In our day, we are called to this role, so that the church can continue to become more open, more accepting, and more loving.

Affirmatively,
Wally

Addresses of Co-coordinators, Peggy and Michael, will be found on page 5.